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SUBJECT: JAMOUS: DEBY STRONG, ABDELWAHID AL NUR WEAK, AND DARFUR
ELECTIONS IMPOSSIBLE BEFORE PEACE ACCORD

REF: NDJAMENA 117

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Due to recent defections within two of the major Chadian opposition movements, President Idriss Deby's Government "faces no major danger" in the next year, SLA/Unity leader Suleiman Jamous told Poloffs on March 25. He nonetheless warned that Deby's overthrow at the instigation of Sudan would "crush" the Darfur rebel movements and lead to "a true genocide" in the region. Jamous indicated that elections in Darfur will not be possible before a political settlement is reached with the Sudanese Government. Casting doubt on the popular support for rival SLA leader Abdulwahid al Nur, Jamous said that a deal between Khartoum, SLA/Unity, and the URF that focused on security should be the focus of the peace process. He proposed that a single Darfur state "ruled by the rebel groups," the provision of one-third of the seats in the national government for Darfurians, the full disarmament of the rebels, and a complete withdrawal of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) from the region would be the most effective guarantee to ensure Khartoum's compliance with a peace agreement.

¶2. Jamous' comments on fissures within the Chadian rebel community track generally with what we know from other sources, including the GOC. That Khartoum's alleged preference for the Arab Soubiane grates on Nouri and Erdimi reflects deep antagonism by non-Arab northerners (Zaghawa and Gorane alike) for Chadian Arabs. If dissension within rebel ranks prevents another attack on N'Djamema until after the 08 rainy season, so much the better, but it is important to remember that the initiative lies entirely in rebel hands: they decide - or not - when and where to move. End summary.

Deby "Faces No Major Danger"

¶3. (SBU) Meeting with Poloffs on March 25, Sudan Liberation Army (SLA)/Unity leader Suleiman Jamous predicted that President Deby "faces no major danger in the near future" and did not anticipate another large-scale attack on N'djamena in the next year. According to Jamous, major elements of Mahamat Nouri's Union des Forces de la Democratie et du Developpment (UFDD) and of Timan Erdimi's Rally of Forces for Change (RFC) have defected to the Chadian Government. In addition, Nouri and Erdimi are angry over Khartoum's perceived support for Ahmed Soubian as the leader of a post-Deby regime, derailing a coordinated rebel offensive.

¶4. (SBU) Jamous acknowledged that SLA/Unity was prepared to assist Deby's Government in its effort to repel the Chadian rebel offensive in February. After the rebel retreat, SLA/Unity sent a delegation, consisting of Jamous and several senior SLA commanders, to N'djamena to "congratulate" Deby. He warned that the collapse of Deby's government would be catastrophic for Darfur as Khartoum would then move to eliminate the rebel groups that are fighting on behalf of

Darfurians. "If Bashir overthrows Deby, the main issue will be to squeeze Darfur," he explained. "They will crush us and a true genocide will start."

No Elections in Darfur Before Peace

15. (SBU) A political settlement between Darfur's rebel groups and the Sudanese Government is a pre-requisite to Darfur's participation in the elections scheduled for 2009, stated Jamous. "There is no chance for Darfur in the elections unless we can make a political deal and have time to prepare before the elections are held," he said. SLA/Unity has sought an alliance with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) against "the center" and remains optimistic that it can work with the "Southerners," which is the reason that senior SLA commander Kadu attended the SPLM-sponsored conference for Darfur rebel movements in late 2007.

16. (SBU) However, Jamous explained that the "international community must know that we're not going to stand in the shade of the Southerners." Darfur must have an adequate share in the federal government--approximately one-third of the positions in the national administration and of the seats in the National Assembly--commensurate with its population.

Abdelwahid: Not As Strong As You Think

17. (SBU) Asserting that SLA/Unity is the strongest military force in Darfur, Jamous dismissed the perception that rival SLA leader Abdelwahid al Nur is the most influential political leader among Darfurians. He blamed the international community for

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"mis-assessing" Abdelwahid's popularity in the IDP camps--which he alleged is only 10-percent of IDPs--and predicted that a political settlement between SLA/Unity, the United Revolutionary Front (URF), and Khartoum would leave Abdelwahid isolated. "It would just be him and Gadura (the chief SLA/Abdelwahid commander) sitting on a mountain," said Jamous. He called on the international community to pressure Abdelwahid and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) to prevent further fragmentation of the movements.

18. (SBU) According to Jamous, both SLA/Unity and the URF were cross-tribal movements with broad appeal--SLA/Unity because it is comprised of Arab, Fur, Kubur, and Zaghawa members and the URF because its leadership consisted of Arabs, Massaleit, and Zaghawa (reftel). Most IDPs are focused on alleviating their suffering rather than political goals, meaning they will support any group that can guarantee security in an agreement with the Government. (Note: Both SLA/Unity and the URF are dominated by the Zaghawa, despite the presence of representatives of some other tribes in both the political and military structures of each movement. End note.)

19. (SBU) Jamous claimed that SLA/Unity has overcome its internal power struggles and there is now consensus that Abdullah Yehia is the movement's leader, with Jamous serving as humanitarian coordinator and Sharif Harir working as the secretary of external relations. The faction is now governed by a "Council of 51" and has left some posts in the movement vacant to accommodate defectors from SLA/Abdelwahid.

Negotiations to Focus on Security

110. (SBU) Emphasizing that SLA/Unity is prepared to start negotiations at any time, Jamous characterized security as paramount and recommended that the UN/AU mediation follow a model similar to the Naivasha process: begin with an agreement on interim security arrangements (like the Machakos Protocol), then address power and wealth-sharing, and then finalize the security framework. He claimed that neither he nor SLA/Unity is interested in securing political positions for themselves, only in addressing the plight of

civilians. Poloff questioned why, if power and wealth-sharing are unimportant, final security arrangements cannot be negotiated as soon as possible in order to protect the civilian population. Jamous replied that power and wealth-sharing were the "check" on Sudan to adhere to its security commitments.

¶11. (SBU) "You cannot trust the Government," said Jamous. "When they find the chance, they won't stop killing civilians." Consolidating Darfur into a single region "ruled by the rebel groups," the full disarmament of the rebels, and a complete withdrawal of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) from the region would be the most effective security guarantee. In addition, ministerial posts for Darfurians in the Government of National Unity will ensure that wealth is dispersed from the "center." The failure of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), said Jamous, is that the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority (TDRA) and its Chairman, Minni Minawi, do not have control over the governors of the three Darfur states. "This is why I told Minni not to sign."

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) Jamous' comments on fissures within the Chadian rebel community track generally with what we know from other sources, including the GOC (see septel report on March 26 meeting with the Chadian Foreign Minister). That Khartoum's alleged preference for the Arab Soubiane grates on Nouri and Erdimi reflects deep antagonism by non-Arab northerners (Zaghawa and Gorane alike) for Chadian Arabs. If dissension within rebel ranks prevents another attack on N'Djamena until after the 08 rainy season, so much the better, but it is important to remember that the initiative lies entirely in rebel hands: they decide - or not - when and where to move. Nigro